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ABSTRACT

This working paper is a product of a regional study in industrial South Wales of the determinants of participation and non-participation in post-compulsory education and training, with special reference to processes of change in the patterns of these determinants over time and to variations between geographical areas. It examines the notion of a learning society in Britain, suggesting that markedly different interpretations of the term are in common use among politicians, economists, policymakers, and educationalists. The paper outlines chief arguments currently being used to advocate the establishment of a learning society in Britain. These arguments have two strands--the claim that the standard of education and training in a country has a direct impact on its economy and that, therefore, expenditure on learning by the state and employers will be recouped, and the claim that there is a lack of justice in the distribution of education and its rewards in Britain today. Since this involves a brief description of the availability of education and training in Britain, the paper allows a preliminary consideration of the extent to which a learning society already exists or can be said to have existed in the past. It concludes that to some extent the "learning society" is used as a term of convenience. Appendixes include definitions and acronyms. Contains 103 references. (YLB)

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PATTERNS OF PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A Cardiff and Bristol University ESRC- funded Learning Society Project

WORKING PAPER 5

The Learning Society

Stephen Gorard, John Furlong, Gareth Rees, and Ralph Fevre

1997

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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THE LEARNING SOCIETY

Stephen Gorard, John Furlong, Gareth Rees and Ralph Fevre

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the notion of a learning society in Britain suggesting that markedly different interpretations of the term are in common use among politicians, economists, policy-makers and educationalists. The paper also outlines some of the chief arguments currently being used to advocate the establishment of a learning society in Britain. These arguments have two main strands - the claim that the standard of education and training in a country has a direct impact on its economy and that therefore expenditure on learning by the state and employers will be recouped, and the claim that there is a lack of justice in the distribution of education and its rewards in Britain today. Since this involves a brief description of the availability of education and training in Britain, the paper also allows a preliminary consideration of the extent to which a learning society already exists or can be said to have existed in the past. It concludes that to some extent the "learning society" is used as a term of convenience. The Learning Society is an ideal notion (but one with very prosaic targets couched in terms of certification) which helps mask the lack of real progress in some respects towards an "educated public", combined with suggestions of economic exploitation and social compulsion.

1. THE ECONOMY OF BRITAIN

One strand of arguments behind the current push for a new learning society is based upon an apparent relationship between economic performance and educational outcomes. Raising the standards of low performers in education is not only a matter of social justice. It may be good for economic efficiency as well (Istance and Rees 1994). Britain's relatively good performance in terms of high level qualifications is outweighed by a failure to provide a sufficient number of workers, at the technician and craft level, with adequate standards of general education and competencies. It is a common, though contested, opinion that slow economic growth in Britain is primarily due to the inadequacy of education and training system (McNabb and Whitfield 1994). Coupled with the defects in British education and training outlined below, the national per capita income in Britain is reportedly one of lowest in Europe. Britain recently had a trade deficit of £10 billion, while France for example has a surplus of £26 billion. A state pension in Britain was £5,960 p.a. in 1994, but the equivalent was £15,000 in Germany (Hugill and Narayan 1995).

Sir Geoffrey Holland, at the North of England Conference 1995, claimed that while Britain has slipped from fourteenth to eighteenth place in a league of global competitiveness, and from twenty-first to twenty-fourth in terms of the skill of the work force, the quality of education is now rated thirty-fifth in the world. It has been suggested that Britain is facing a balance of payments crisis, coupled with a falling share of world exports, and economic growth markedly less than that of competitors such as Germany, France and Italy (Edwards et al. 1993). There is also a weakness in British initial and continuing education. Many government agency publications and others have now reported skill shortages in Britain (e.g. DE 1988, CBI 1989, DES 1991, DE 1994) and much of the blame for this has been laid on the education and training system (e.g. Bosworth 1992, Haskel and Martin 1993, IFF 1994).

One aim of education might be to encourage the creation of a highly educated work-force, multi-skilled or re-trainable where possible, for the knowledge based high technology economy likely in the twenty-first century. Another is to redefine the notion of "skill" in a learning society, to include the ability to learn, and to encourage a high capacity to face new challenges and orientations in the workplace. Despite a newly developed demand for multi-skilled intermediary

occupational categories such as craft and technician grades in industry, Britain is failing to train adequately according to some (Cutler 1992), and this is leading to skills shortages, particularly in manufacturing and construction (Green and Ashton 1992). A particular problem has been seen as an increasing demand for mathematics skills for multi-skilled workers. "*We are hurtling towards a twenty-first century in which the jobs available will be jobs that robots cannot do and where our survival, both economically and socially, depends on applied intelligence, enterprise, initiative, flexibility and ability to survive rapid change*" (Sir Geoffrey Holland, former Permanent Secretary at the DfE, at the North of England Conference 1995). The notion of a job for life and a career company are now apparently obsolete concepts (Ashley and Walkley 1996) and continuous re-education is needed if people are to lead fruitful and enjoyable lives. "*The blunt truth is that there will be no work for the unskilled in the future*" (Jones 1996 p. 29). Workers may face the possibility of more part-time and more short-term employment with brief periods of unemployment and earlier retirement. They would therefore need to be educated for "employability", to have a flexible attitude to work and an individual responsibility for training and to realise that suitability for employment is a continuous requirement and not a one-off event (Ashley and Walkley 1996). Initial schooling is considered inadequate preparation for later life (Edwards et al. 1993). In this version schools and colleges need to adapt and not continue preparing people for an old-fashioned world of specialisms and static work, presumably because this is easier to envisage and cheaper to fund than creating more permanent full-time jobs. However, the danger may be that although loose employment contracts are attractive and flexible to employers, high turnover of staff may weaken existing training arrangements (Istance and Rees 1995).

In this account, a modern economy and the creation of wealth needs a high level of skill in the workforce, not just in manufacturing, but also in service industries, and at all levels, as well as an increased use of technology (Scottish Office 1991). There is a prevalent concept that training is a determinant of success, and that this is one reason why the Pacific rim economies are performing so well in relative terms (in Rees 1997). The current challenges to the economy are the global market, competition from South East Asia, technology and new methods of production. These challenges are so great that they could even lead to the collapse of some western democracies with their post-1945 compacts (Coffield 1996a). In

the next 20 years it has been estimated that 1.2 billion workers in developing countries will move into production, therefore depressing the level of wages elsewhere. A poor standard of vocational education and training leads to poorly technically-educated managers, who find it difficult to see the advantages of new technology, making them conservative in the use of new equipment (Keep 1991). Lack of skills means that machinery in Britain is poorly maintained, leading to a high proportion of down time. Low skill levels in the workforce can also trap companies in low cost high volume production (Keep 1991). Therefore the economy is said to depend largely on the skills of the workforce created by their education and training. In addition, the acquisition of skills is seen in prevalent forms of human capital theory as a key determinant of career success (Greenhalgh and Stewart 1987). If occupational status is estimated by payment per hour, those in the lowest paid occupations show far higher mobility if they have had training, while in one study 65% of those with no training were still in the lowest paid category after 10 years (Greenhalgh and Stewart 1987). Similarly, in another study, 18 months after leaving school those who had been involved in YTS of any sort were much more likely to be in a job than those who spent the initial period unemployed (Main and Shelly 1990).

An unproved case?

While it remains axiomatic for many politicians that getting education and training right will have very great economic benefits, the suggestion that poor educational performance is a cause of poor economic performance requires a lot to establish it. Establishing a causal link from a curriculum change for example to economic improvement is very difficult (Yeomans 1996). The two measures must be consistently related over time and across nations, but with a time lag so that changes in educational outcomes preface variations in economic indicators. In the absence of such evidence, an equally parsimonious explanation of any relationship might be that it is easier for countries with a healthy economy to afford quality education. The assumption that advanced economies need highly educated and trained populations and a skilled and flexible workforce for economic reasons can anyway be exaggerated. Most people will probably not get secure highly skilled employment whatever happens (Edwards et al. 1993). Most new businesses and associated jobs are in fact "low-tech", in areas such as retailing and traditional services (Keep 1991), and while there is a demand for high tech and high skills, there are still plenty of unskilled and low skilled jobs, especially in personal

domestic service, so the gap may be growing, with increased technology leading to de-skilling in some areas (NIACE 1994). There is no evidence that increased expenditure on education and training leads to any improvement. In fact several of the highest spending nations have the worst outcomes (Smithers and Robinson 1991). There is a gap between what is supposed to be happening in terms of a shift from careers to employability, to education-led economies, and the globalisation of competition. The degree of change on length of job tenure is disputable, training in transferable skills is not generally available to employees perhaps especially in Britain, while many industries, such as those in the services sector, remain firmly local and these are often the current growth areas (Keep 1997).

Even for the individual, there is some doubt whether education and training pay off in strictly economic terms. Although a common goal of many economic studies of training is to relate learning to earnings, their findings are not clear-cut (McNabb and Whitfield 1994). Other kinds of studies have suggested that training leads to greater productivity in firms (Maguire et al. 1993), but these are susceptible to the same criticism. How is the productivity of the firm as a causatory agent in the advent of training controlled? For individuals, the absence of qualification may be a barrier to employment (Mid Glamorgan TEC 1996), and training may lead to improved promotion prospects, better pay and greater job satisfaction (Maguire et al. 1993), or greater social mobility (Edwards et al. 1993), but these individuals may have been trained because they were already on a trajectory to relative economic success. Did the YTS trainees decide not to accept unemployment after school for the same reasons that they were in a job 18 months later in the Main and Shelly work? YTS did not contain much of a training element (Whitfield and Bourlakis 1991) and was anyway found to be less significant than background variables such as father's employment status and school-leaving qualifications in explaining later employment (Main and Shelly 1990). The equivalent study has not been done with pairs matched in terms of background characteristics. On the other hand, some studies already suggest that training and education make no difference to economic outcomes such as employment rates. In the short-term, the employment rates of those staying on in post-compulsory education, or undertaking Youth Training are no better than those making a traditional transition to the labour market at 16 (Roberts et al. 1991). Most vocational qualifications, and academic examinations such as GCSE

taken after the age of 16 produce no return on the investment of time and opportunity costs (Roberts et al. 1991). There is no personal economic return on any qualification less than HNC/HND compared to those with no qualifications (NIACE 1994), and no lifelong return in earnings on any vocational qualification at all. In fact, Greenhalgh and Stewart (1987) estimate that training only has any impact for the first four weeks after its completion in terms of individual earnings and promotion. The value of training depreciates rapidly over time, if it had value initially. The quality, level and duration of much training remains very low (Keep 1997) and any recent increase in the number of recorded training episodes could be easily negated by a decrease in their length alone.

Part of the reason for these findings may be that British employers undervalue vocational training, still preferring to use academic prowess as a predictor of "trainability" (Whitfield and Bourlakis 1991). Those who have been successfully educated in the past should be cheaper to train in the future, and since employers see training as an overhead, they concentrate their efforts on the immediately applicable future (Deamer 1996). Selection for employment is therefore not based on technical competencies as much as social attributes such as age, gender and ethnicity, and on the applicant's attitude to work (Rees et al. 1989) as far as it can be judged. Despite talk of the pace of technical change, there has been a growth of semi-skilled and unskilled jobs in South Wales, such that most manufacturing jobs now require only very limited skill. Almost anyone would be capable of doing them after a brief period of on-the-job training (Rees et al. 1989). Claims of skill shortages by employers should anyway be treated with caution. It is not always possible to distinguish between a shortage of skilled applicants for jobs because they do not exist, or because no one with the appropriate skills wishes to apply for the conditions on offer. The skills needed to get a job now encompass the behaviour of labour, including punctuality, reliability and commitment, but these are not the kinds of skills that usually spring to mind when politicians and economists talk of skills shortages. In-house induction to the job inculcates further desirable (to the employer) attributes but does not certify them so that they are not easily transferred (Rees et al. 1989). Few firms find much weakness in the basic education of their recruits that needs correcting for them to work effectively (Pettigrew et al. 1989).

In light of the above it is ironic that the advent of TECs implies the need for employers to become more involved in education, as though they are the best judges of the skills needed now (which they probably are) and for the future (which they probably aren't) and even though many have previously shown little interest in investing in skills (Istance and Rees 1995). There is some evidence that this implication is unwarranted (Hickox 1995, Spielhofer 1996). Almost as many British employers are worried about providing their workers with transferable skills and so running the risk of losing them to competitors, as report being prompted to train workers in order to maintain competitiveness in their market (Deloitte Haskins and Sells 1989). Few had a realistic training plan and even fewer had training targets or had compared the cost and benefits of training, since the vast majority of employers simply do not see training as being central to their success. When asked about skills shortages, employers give an almost Pavlovian response concerning that much-aired monolith "numeracy'n'literacy", which upon examination is usually restricted to problems faced by trainees in passing vocational certificates with outside agencies (Spielhofer 1996). Few employers could specify an actual need within the job for either literacy or numeracy, and none expected job applicants to have any more specific skills in addition.

In fact, if the problems posed to the British economy by globalisation are so great, it becomes perverse for the government or agencies such as CBI (with their notion of transferable core skills, personal profiles, action plans, independent careers guidance, and training credits) to concentrate on individuals and their lack of skills or training, or to bemoan the fact that few are willing to pay for their own training (Coffield 1996a). Increased marketisation of training may be attractive financially but suffers two main defects. Firstly, Britain may be suffering more from lack of skilled jobs than a lack of skilled workers, and leaving things to the market will inevitably tend to a low-skills equilibrium of the kind appearing in South Wales, polarising accessibility to training (Istance and Rees 1995). A market in training cannot overcome the wariness of employers with regard to training and staff turnover and it cannot therefore maintain a balance between general (transferable) and specific skills, under-financing the former (Greenhalgh and Mavrotas 1994). Secondly, freedom of choice for the individual will lead to situations of the kind observed in one of the research sites in the present study where a majority of female school-leavers went into training

for hairdressing (see Gorard et al. 1997b). In fact, in the new Modern Apprenticeship Scheme, ten times as many people want to study hairdressing as Information Technology (Coffield 1996a). Markets may be a poor basis for social policy, since employers (and TECs) are too concerned with the short term (Gleeson et al. 1996) and passing responsibility from local authorities to TEC's which are more like QUANGOs may have lessened local democratic control of formal learning.

2. EDUCATION IN BRITAIN

It is difficult to asses the true value of British education compared to other countries for the same reason that it is difficult to assess changes in qualifications over time, and yet qualifications are used because they seem relatively easy to measure and compare. Qualifications in themselves are not education or training. They are certified public portable evidence of education. In some cases they are "sharp-pencilled" (finding from present study) or even bought, and not having them is not evidence of lack of education. There is ambiguity about their marking and grading. Where public examinations are norm-referenced the resultant grades should be similar between two large countries with similar ability populations, by definition. If they are not, the simplest explanation for the difference is that the proportions used in norm-referencing are different. Where the grading is criterion-referenced, cultural disparities do not allow easy comparison of the criteria. For example, in a recent speech by the Prime Minister it was claimed that whereas 70% of 13 year-old children in Korea were able to correctly multiply two numbers with fractional components, the figure for Europe as a whole was 55%, and for England it was 13%. Such a comparison does not mean that there are not other skilled tasks which might reverse the ratios, since learning to multiply without the aid of a calculator is not a necessary or sufficient indicator of education. Another seemingly easy metric for comparison is expenditure, although it is seldom made clear whether high expenditure is a sign of a good educational system or an inefficient one. Bearing these reservations in mind, the following is a summary of the current position of formal education in Britain.

The real level of government expenditure on education has gone from 5.2% of Gross Domestic Product in 1970-71, to reach a peak of 6.6% in 1975/6, but declined to 4.8% by 1990/91 (Hartley 1994). Now, while Britain spends 32 ecu per person on education, and 27% of school leavers achieve a GCSE, grade C or above, in English, a Science, and Mathematics, both France and Germany spend 66 ecu per head, and 66% of school leavers achieve equivalent passes in the national language, science and mathematics (Hugill and Narayan 1995). Pupils in upper secondary schooling in Britain learn the fewest foreign languages of all the EU states, fewer than half as many languages as the European average. Students on vocational courses generally study no languages (Eurostat 1995). Examples of the apparently poor outcomes of British compulsory education abound. Over 20% of 16 year olds do not achieve even a GCSE grade G in English or Mathematics, and are thus not at the level of proficiency of the average 12 year old (Pyke 1996). In fact, although pupils in Britain go through the longest period of compulsory full-time education in Europe, the standard of education of the British population is only in the middle of the 11 countries for which figures are available (Eurostat 1995). The proportion of the population in the age range 25 to 59, who are only educated to lower secondary level is around 50%, compared to a figure of less than 20% for Germany, for example. The figure, which is even higher for females, has been improving (reducing) very slowly over the last 20 years, more slowly than many other member states, and given the fact that the greatest decrease has been in the proportion of females with no post-compulsory education, the relative figures for males may actually be getting worse.

Comparative studies have found a particularly "British distribution" of pupil scores. There is a high average performance among the top 10%, but a low median value, and a fuller longer tail than many countries. Although standards of education are rising slowly, except perhaps in Mathematics and Science, the gap between the achievements of the "best" and the "worst" is also growing. Under-achievement is clearly linked to poverty (Hugill and Narayan 1995), which is one reason why education is seen by some as an engine of class reproduction. At least 80% of the children of unskilled workers do not stay in full-time education after the age of 16 (Nash 1996b). Klein (1996) found that only 10% of black children of recent Caribbean origin reached the benchmark figure of five or more GCSEs grade C, compared to 44% of all children. Very few of them achieved a pass in Mathematics, without which they cannot be lawyers, teachers, accountants or take courses in business studies, for example. In general, 10 and 14 year olds perform badly in international comparisons of competencies. Many children seem to lose faith in schools and truancy rises to 50% in some classes (Smithers and Robinson

1991). There is effectively no mainstream education post-16 for most of the school population, since A levels cater for a minority only, particularly in comprehensive schools.

The traditional view of education in Britain is as a "two track system". The educational experience for some has always been, and still is, excellent, but the system as a whole is selective and specialised. The examinations at ages 16 and 18 are used to separate out those who are qualified to continue. The A level achievements of students in Britain are as good as those anywhere in Europe (Hugill and Narayan 1995), particularly in Science, while the HE system is also of a high standard, being relatively short with very low drop out rate (Smithers and Robinson 1991). The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) 1984, concluded that among 18 year olds specialising in Science, England came in second place out of 15 countries. However, a high proportion of the population achieve much less than this. Fewer students in Britain continue to any form of post-compulsory than most countries, and of those who do carry on in education, only around half undertake vocational, professional, or job-related training (56%). Although technical and vocational alternatives catch some who have apparently failed at schooling, these routes lack coherence and credibility (Smithers and Robinson 1991). More students therefore take general academic courses in Britain, but fewer of these continue to Higher Education than in any other country in Europe (Eurostat 1995). Since most upper secondary courses in Britain are terminal, in the sense that they are the last to be taken before entering the workforce, it might make sense for more of them to be vocational - in comparison to other member states, such as Germany - and not less.

The UK has a unique place in the educational "league table" of Europe, since it is the only member country in which fewer than half of the 18 year-olds participate in education (Eurostat 1995). For the UK, this figure of 42% still participating in education in 1992, whether at school, in higher education, or full-time training is the lowest in Europe, and exactly half that of Germany and the figures for those aged 21 are similar. Of all the member states, the UK had until recently one of the lowest proportions of its student population in Higher Education, way below the average figure for Europe (11%). This may be partly a result of the relatively low qualification standard of much of the population, and of the split

between the high standard of the education provided for a privileged minority, and the standard for the rest. The difference between the UK and other member states, is not just in the absolute proportion of the school population that continues to Higher Education. It is also reflected in the longer, and more frequently part-time, courses elsewhere, such that students remain in some kind of education later. For example the median age of HE students in the UK is 22 years, while in Germany it is 25. Total figures of the proportion of the population participating in education at each level also disguise differences between countries in terms of the range and nature of the subjects studied. Sciences and technical subjects such as Engineering and Architecture, are less popular than arts subjects in most member states, but the difference is more marked in the UK. The UK, along with Ireland, has the lowest proportion of HE students following courses in Engineering, for example (Eurostat 1995) and a very small minority of these are female (13%). In fact the UK has the second lowest figure in Europe in this respect. Since the expansion of higher education (HE) in 1992, there are more participants and this may have broadened the range of people entering HE making the situation more equitable, but this may have been accompanied by inflation and so devaluation of the qualifications obtained. The average degree award which had previously been a grade 2.ii had, by 1994/95 become a grade 2.i (Scott 1996). Of course, this does not mean that the students are necessarily any brighter or that the teaching is any better. Some subjects now have a two tier system such as the B.Sc. in engineering which is not professionally accredited, unlike the B.Eng., or they have four year courses. There may be even be a hierarchy of universities, with some job advertisements asking for a degree from a "good" university (Scott 1996). The Scottish Office (1991) points out that there are now higher and higher levels of qualification in the UK. Does this mean a more skilled population?

The proportion of some age groups in education has increased from 1985 to 1995 (DfEe 1996b). By the end of 1985 47% of 16 year olds were in full-time education, 19% were on government training schemes. By the end of 1995 71% were in full-time education, a dramatic increase, with only 11% on government schemes, and another 5% were on employer-funded or other schemes. The figures for 17 year olds in 1995 were 59% and 14%, and for 18 year olds 40% and 7% (DfEe 1996b). This may have led to some complacency in Britain over the level of educational attainment of the majority of the population. In a recent

OECD publication comparing 26 education systems world-wide, "Education at a Glance", the UK was in second position, behind Germany, in terms of the percentage of the overall population who had completed upper (post-compulsory) secondary education (Rafferty 1995). Such comparisons between attainments in different education systems are always difficult, because of different examination systems, and different ages of transfer between schools, but in the OECD report the UK has treated the GCSE examination as a characteristic of upper secondary education, which puts GCSEs on a par with the French Baccalaureate, for example (Rafferty 1995) to which it clearly not equivalent.

At the HE level, there are far too few students of certain categories represented for this to be a random effect, particularly in the older universities. Among those missing are disabled students, currently only 2% and mostly those with unseen problems such as diabetes, asthma, epilepsy and of course dyslexia (Young 1996). Of 27,000 disabled people in HE, only 2,500 have mobility problems, 1000 are visually challenged and 1500 have hearing difficulties. Also missing to any great extent are those with working-class occupational backgrounds. The position for those without traditional qualifications such as A levels, and those of recent ethnic minority background has improved and is significantly better (Young 1996), although some groups such as young blacks of recent Caribbean origin and women of recent Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are still under-represented.

Participation in education is not the same as achievement however. Although participation is often cited as being low in Britain, 86% of 17 year-olds and 69% of 18 year-olds may be undertaking some form of training, such as YT (Smithers and Robinson 1991), but half of these may fail to get any qualifications (Pyke 1996). At the graduate level there are similar rates of vocational qualifications in the UK as France, Germany and the Netherlands, but at the intermediate level the rate is much lower, and there are many more people in Britain with no vocational qualification at all (Smithers and Robinson 1991). There is a particular shortage of middle level technical qualifications (Greenhalgh and Mavrotas (1994). Over 50% are educated to only lower secondary level (Eurostat 1995). These are all way short of the National Targets:
By 2000 50% of the employed workforce should have a qualification at NVQ level 3 or equivalent. The figure for 1994 was 39.2%.
By 1997 80% of youths attain NVQ level 2 or above.

By 1996 all employees will take part in training as the norm, of which 50% will be aiming for qualifications within the NVQ/GNVQ framework.
By 1996 50% of medium-sized organisations should qualify as Investors in People, as assessed by TECs (Employment Department Group 1994).

Progress towards the National Targets has been mixed (see Appendix A) and this may be one of the reasons that the original target of all employees taking part in training has been reduced to the rhetorical equivalent - all employees should have "access" to training (Istance and Rees 1995). The number of qualifications is increasing but the proportion of the workforce qualified to NVQ level 3 remains the same (DfEe 1995). A lot of employers are confused by the variety of modern qualifications, which is understandable considering that the UK has a maze of perhaps 16,000 different qualifications according to the Dearing Report on 16-19 education (Pyke 1996). This may mean that employers are less involved in any scheme such as GNVQ than considered necessary by its devisors. Only 60% of employers had even heard of NVQ in 1992 (Maguire et al. 1993). However there are indications that the situation is improving. Over two thirds of the age cohort remained in education after compulsory school leaving age in 1994, and a further 20% went on to some form of government training plan (DfEe 1995). 80% of people in the workforce in UK have a qualification and this figure is rising every year, and nearly half of all employed people have an A level or equivalent (DfEe 1995).

The availability of training

Figures for the availability of training may be misleading, since to some extent they depend on what is considered to be a training episode. If one generation in a family undertook apprenticeships, and a later one took a succession of one-day Information Technology courses, it is not clear that the younger person has actually had more training, despite the number of courses attended. In addition, most organisations are motivated to appear to be training their employees, and several surveys mention only the number of organisations providing a type of training without specifying how many recipients are involved. There are further differences in the interpretation of the term "training". The DfEe (1995) claims that training has increased from 1980 to 1994, but with a plateau in 1992. However, the main growth is in off-the-job training, on employers premises, mostly lasting less than a week, with only 3.6% of cases involving training for

more than a year. Training in small establishments takes place much less frequently. Among medium to large establishments, 80% provide some form of health and safety training, and 40% provide management training, although it is unclear for how many individuals. The same 80% of medium to large employers provide off-the-job training lasting more than a year for some employees. Two thirds claimed to have a training plan, but only half had it written down. Slightly more than half had a training budget (DfEe 1995). Training rates also vary significantly by sector of employment (Greenhalgh and Mavrotas 1994) but, as noted above, the higher incidence in some areas correlates with more short courses so it is not clear that actual skill changes are very different in the different sectors. Park (1994) found that 50% of employer-arranged study lasted for one month or less. In fact, most episodes were part-time, most of which were for women.

A 1982 survey suggested that 22% of UK adults were in some form of education or training, or had been so in the last three years. An estimate in 1990 for the same figure was 30% (Harrison 1993). This is confirmed by the finding that the proportion of the workforce receiving training rose from 1979 to 1989 (Greenhalgh and Mavrotas 1994). In a snapshot in 1979, 5% of men and 3% of women were undertaking formal training at that time. Most people had never received any, and most of the rest had only one episode. The most common form for men at that time was an apprenticeship. Between 1985 and 1989 there was an increase of 50% in reported episodes for those in work, with the frequency for women overtaking that for men for the first time (Greenhalgh and Mavrotas 1994). Apprenticeships declined, and short courses lasting less than a month increased in proportion. In a study of the workforce aged 16 to 54, Park (1994) found that two thirds had been involved in some kind of education or training in the previous three years, which is a substantially higher figure than that found by some previous surveys (NIACE 1994). 19% were involved in work-related training at the time of the survey, and a further 29% had done some in the previous three years. Most of these were in work. The other 18% were involved in non-vocational learning.

In 1986/87, employers spent 4.6% of GDP, or 0.3% of their turnover on training, which was equivalent to £809 per person, most of which is accounted for by labour costs. There is a suggestion that this is a rise since 1984 (Deloitte

Haskins and Sells 1989). The majority of training is paid for by employers (Greenhalgh and Mavrotas 1994), currently 67.2% of fees (Employment Department Group 1994), with 14.5% paid for by the learner or family, and 10.7% by the government or local agency. Similarly, two thirds of job-related training is provided by the employer (DfEe 1995), with 90% of employees being fully paid while it takes place. Park (1994) found a slightly lower proportion of employer funded episodes (41%), although these were still the majority for those in work. An additional 18% of episodes were described as "free" but arranged for by the employer. Added together these two figures are comparable to other recent findings. Similarly 17% of episodes were funded solely by the employee. Of those learners not in work, 37% were at least partly funded by a government scheme (Park 1994). 32% of all training took place at work.

There is some evidence that the proportion financed by central and local government is rising in real terms (DfEe 1995). Government expenditure has been concentrated on training for initial entry and re-entry to work (Park 1994), whereas both employers and employees expenditure is concentrated on the employed adult population (Greenhalgh and Mavrotas 1994). If other costs such as travel or child-care and opportunity costs such as loss of leisure time are included, the clear majority of training episodes for those in work are financed jointly by the employee and employer (Greenhalgh and Mavrotas 1994). Around half of work-based training is initiated by the employee, and in a further 20% of cases the employee had an element of choice in what to do or whether to do it (Park 1994).

Most training is health and safety, induction, new technology, management, supervisory, apprenticeships, and foreign languages (DfEe 1995), in descending order. Together these account for 96% of training episodes. Fewer people are being classified as apprentices every year, and in 1995 the figure was half that of 1989. An in-depth study by Pettigrew et al (1989) agreed that induction training was far more common than new skills provision in the UK. Most later training is project based and triggered by changes in product design or customer base or new technology, for example. In another study, 20% of training in the workforce was to do with computers or keyboard skills, and 10% was relevant to management and administration (Park 1994). 40% of the episodes led to a formal qualification, and these were more common among younger people, those in

unqualified professional jobs, the unemployed, and those paying for themselves. 7% of the episodes were ended early, and 15% of those taking a qualification failed (Park 1994).

The two track system of training

The second strand of arguments for the learning society is based upon justice. It proposes that access to education and training is unfairly distributed in the UK, and that it is the same type of people who have opportunities throughout their lives, and perhaps across generations. In one version of this argument, the education and training system is seen as a good one, providing a product appropriate for all, and it is the problem of access that needs to be solved to ensure greater and wider participation. Whereas in Britain less than 50% of the population take part in any form of post-initial education, in Sweden 50% take part every year (Titmus 1994).

Those who are employed are more likely to receive training than those unemployed or economically inactive (NIACE 1994), and the mode and level of employment also make a difference. 65% of full-time employees were found to have undertaken training in the last three years in one survey, as opposed to 41% of part-time employees (Park 1994). In general, those people employed at a higher grade get more and better training, with Human Resource Development generally confined to managers, and each tier of recruitment trained differently (Pettigrew et al. 1989). Manual grades, other than apprentices, generally get less training, and established employees get least of all (Deloitte Haskins and Sells 1989). Those with supervisory responsibilities or higher pay generally get more (Park 1994), and this naturally means that work-based training is far more common among those in more prestigious occupational classes (Harrison 1993, DfEe 1995). Adult learning has been described as the preserve of the middle-class, and those of higher social status (McGivney 1991). For those in employment, the kind of employer is linked to the availability of training. Training is more common in larger establishments, in those that are growing fastest, and in the public sector than in private manufacturing (Deloitte Haskins and Sells 1989). Training is stronger in firms with high recruitment or staff attrition (Pettigrew et al. 1989), and most common in finance and business services. New recruits working for a large public sector organisation at a high grade are most likely to be trained, particularly if that organisation is in the

process of changing technology (Green 1994). Those working in public administration, education, and health get more training, while those in technical positions, agriculture, and plant and machine operatives get less (DfEe 1995).

Those who are already better educated or qualified, and presumably more likely to be employed at a higher grade, are also more likely to receive later training (McGivney 1991, Harrison 1993, DfEe 1995), perhaps because their previous educational record is seen as providing evidence of their being trainable (Pettigrew et al. 1989). In one study, only 3% of those who left school at the minimum age undertook training in the last three years compared to 65% of those with immediate post-initial education (Park 1994). Similarly 77% of those who left school with at least one GCSE became learners compared to only 50% of the others. The best qualified applicants also get the best employer-based training in government schemes such as YTS (Banks et al. 1992).

Men are more often trained than women - 55% versus 43% in one three year study - (Park 1994). In addition, there have been suggestions that women are more intimidated than men by the demands of examinations, and that this is a deterrent to returning to college as an adult (Burstall 1996). Since the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act divided vocational and non-vocational courses, and only the first attract funding council money if the they lead to national qualifications, the concept of education for leisure has all but disappeared (Burstall 1996). Previous non-vocational courses were precisely those that could be used by women especially to gain confidence before progressing to assessed courses. Gender is clearly related to other characteristics. Males are more likely to be employed full time as well as being learners, while women more often look after a family and are less likely to be learners (Tremlett et al. 1995), with unpaid work at home not yet being widely accredited (Butler 1993). Younger male well-qualified employees are the most likely to receive further training (Green 1994). Those caring for children are the least likely. However, while men appear to get longer training, women may get more frequent short-term training, perhaps of less than 9 hours per week (DfEe 1995). If training is measured in episodes, in fact, full-time women employees are more frequently trained than men, while for part-time employees the situation is the reverse. In one study, black women employees (not including those from the Indian sub-continent) were the most likely to have received training in the previous four weeks (DfEe 1995).

Most people undertaking vocational training are young (McGivney 1993, DfEe 1995), 58% of learners are in the age range 25-29, and more have no children - 50% versus 36% (Park 1994). Only 9% of those involved in post-initial education and training are aged over 65 (Harrison 1993). In fact, vocational training seems to cease at the age of 50 (NIACE 1994). This is reinforced by the emphasis of TECs on Youth Training, involving teenagers, and Training for Work, for the still economically active unemployed (Istance and Rees 1995).

In summary, occupation, mode of employment, status, class, industry, organisation, qualifications, gender, and age are currently the major determinants of later training in the UK. Training by employers concentrates on full-time permanent predominantly white male workers, even though these are now a declining part of the workforce. Within this category training is more common for younger and higher level grades. Those groups under-represented in education and training are unskilled manual workers, unqualified, part-time and temporary workers, unemployed, lone parents, women of lower social class, refugees, ex-offenders, the relatively illiterate and innumerate, and those with special needs or disabilities (NIACE 1994).. Although 14% of all adults are recorded as disabled, only 0.3% of these participated in HE in 1990.

The barriers to learning

Research has suggested several barriers that potential learners face and to widen, as well as merely increase, the access to post-compulsory education and training, these barriers need to be recognised and faced. To a large extent they are presaged by the determinants of adult learning. Harrison (1993) categorises the barriers neatly into situational, to do with the lifestyle of the prospective learner, institutional, to do with the structure of opportunities, and dispositional, relating to the learners' own attitudes.

Perhaps the most obvious obstacle that most people face when envisaging episodes of learning is the cost (McGivney 1991, Maguire et al. 1993). This cost could be of the direct kind, such as fees, or more commonly indirect, such as the costs of transport, child-care, foregone income, time and even the emotional cost for those with families (Hand et al. 1994). These costs are clearly more restrictive for the poor (NIACE 1994), and to some extent for women, who are still faced with the greater burden of child-care, for which support is generally poor (FEU

1993), and other domestic responsibilities (Park 1994). There are anomalies in the benefits and grants systems (FEU 1993) which confuse the financial issue. In addition to the problem of finding fees in one lump sum in some cases since payment of fees by instalments is not generally allowable, several learners are surprised by the level of other expenses such as examination fees and stationery costs. The welfare system and the availability of cheap loans play a role here (Maguire et al. 1993). Benefit entitlement is incompatible with a grant from local authority, and even when all of the costs of training are met by the individual, state benefits are often withdrawn. Unemployed people on training courses are therefore penalised by a system which says in relation to going on a training or education course or programme, *"one of the conditions... to be entitled to unemployment benefit is that you must be ... able and willing to take up any job which you are offered immediately. You might not satisfy this rule while you are on a training or education course or programme..."* (The Employment Service, amended 1991). Currently 16 hours per week (21 before October 1996) are the maximum that one can study without losing benefit. In 1995, 20,000 people quit their courses because of uneven interpretation of these rules by benefits offices (Nash 1996a, Keep 1997). General knowledge of the incentives available to train is sketchy (Taylor and Spencer 1994). The much-lauded increase in students continuing to HE has been accompanied by an increase in the number in debt and the situation is worse for the mature students. In 1995 of those over 26 in HE many were over £7,000 in debt already (Garner and Imeson 1996) and the situation will get worse with the ending of the older students allowance. In general, adult education is the easiest sector for government/local government in which to economise when faced with financial stress (Kelly 1992).

The loss of time, particularly for a social life is another cost of learning in some cases (McGivney 1991, FEU 1993), especially in a country with a tradition of the longest average working week in Europe for males in the manufacturing sector at least (CERI 1975). For everyone, television has emerged as a powerful educational force, at least potentially, and a stimulant to new interests, but it can also be seen as disruptive. Adult education is now suffering not so much from lack of leisure time but from the multiplicity of opportunities available for that time (Kelly 1992). Taking a course often involves an adjustment in lifestyle which may be possible for an individual, but is more of a problem for those with dependants or in long-term relationships. Relationships can be strained,

particularly for women taking courses to progress beyond the educational level of a male partner - the "Educating Rita" syndrome - (FEU 1993). Women who are more likely to be employed part-time, less likely to be aware of opportunities stemming from the work-place and have domestic and child-care responsibilities, and generally poorer transport facilities, therefore face many threats to participation (Maguire et al. 1993). The most vulnerable women from the most disadvantaged backgrounds face the most barriers (Burstall 1996).

The institutional barriers to training often come from the procedures of the providing organisations, in terms of advertisement, entry procedures, timing and scale of provision, and general lack of flexibility (McGivney 1991). Colleges of FE, for example, still assume a 17 year old norm which is fast changing, and they need to adapt to flexible opportunities for learning (FEU 1993). Adults differ from children in many ways, but adapting to having them in a class could benefit the youngsters, since the adults can have a wealth of relevant experience. People want to fit learning around other tasks of equal importance in their lives, since they cannot always get time off (Park 1994). They have interrupted patterns of participation and diverse progression routes (Istance and Rees 1995). Non-completion of courses is so now high that it must be partly seen as an indictment of the quality of provision at all levels, schools, FE, HE, and YT (Istance and Rees 1995). Drop out is commonly caused by people discovering that they are on the wrong course (Pyke 1996), with nearly half of students in one survey feeling they had made a mistake (FEU 1993), and part of the blame for this must lie with the institutions in not giving appropriate initial guidance (Maguire et al. 1993, Istance and Rees 1995). Many learners are disappointed by the lack of help available in choosing a course and in staying on it (FEU 1993). There is in general a low level of awareness of sources of information and financial incentives for training (Park 1994), such as the Training to Work scheme.

Part of the cause of lack of training must be the lack of appropriate provision (Banks et al. 1992). Even those studying may not have found what they actually wanted (Park 1994). This is particularly true of non work-related training and learning for leisure (NIACE 1994), and is reinforced by the current emphasis on certified courses, heavily backed up by the incentives in the funding arrangements to provide accreditation of all adult education. Not only does this deny some people the opportunity to learn new interests and make new friends, it denies

returners an easy entry route back into education (Maguire et al. 1993), especially for women who may be more intimidated by examination demands, according to one study (Burstall 1996). It is often very simple provision, perhaps involvement in reading schemes for children, that can eventually lead to accredited continuing learning (Hunter Carsch 1996). Even where provision is available, knowledge of opportunities may be patchy for some parts of the population (Taylor and Spencer 1994), giving many a feeling that "*you are on your own*". In addition, an estimated 6 million adults in Britain may have difficulty with writing or numeracy (NIACE 1994), and one sixth of adults have problems with basic literacy. These deficiencies appear to pass through generations of the same families (DfEe 1996c), reinforcing their importance as a "reproductive" determinant of adult non-learning.

Whatever barriers are faced, they are harder for the less motivated prospective student (FEU 1993). The lack of provision of learning for leisure, and at home with a focus only on the formal public arena especially of work means that learners may be seen as younger, better educated, and from higher income groups than they really are (Edwards et al. 1993). To some extent, this image becomes self-realising. People with these characteristics tend to be selected for learning, and so social practice becomes reproductive, and education can thus be seen as middle-class and "*not for the likes of us*". It may be a poor experience of previous educational episodes that creates the obstacle for continuing education (Taylor and Spencer 1994). If initial education has not led to the creation of basic studying skills such as numeracy, this provides a further barrier. There may be as many as 6 million adults in the UK today with fundamental problems concerning basic reading (Nash 1996).

However, other studies have found no difference between learners and non-learners in their attitudes to full-time education (Park 1994). Most people acknowledged the benefit of learning, although learners may be more likely to report non-material benefits, but at least a third, especially volunteer self-funders and the unemployed, did not see learning as having any positive effect on job prospects (Park 1994).

The influence of lack of motivation to learn may be underestimated by literature concentrating on the more easily visible barriers such as cost and entry

al. 1994). Since some of these definitions are very loose, the types of training considered vary considerably between different studies, so making comparisons between them difficult.

Adult education has come to be seen as a limited activity with recreational or compensatory intent (Cropley 1977), compared to recurrent education for example. However, in the sense that adult education only refers to the education of adults (Lowe 1970), both formal and less formal, four main types have been suggested (Squires 1993). These are the four main types of learning which have been addressed by the study of which this paper forms a part.

1. Institutions primarily to teach adults. In this study such centres are represented by LEA adult education class, university extra-mural classes, Open University and WEA classes for example.
2. Institutions teaching adults in addition to teaching children. In this study this generally means state-funded Higher and Further Education.
3. Institutions teaching adults but whose primary function is not education. In this study this usually means companies, trade unions, clubs, or voluntary associations.
4. Independent learning by individuals, perhaps with the help of friends, using libraries, museums, and of course, television.

Lifelong learning

"Lifelong learning" (or lifetime learning) is a combination of initial education and adult education, a totality from birth to death, including both formal and informal learning (Dave 1976), in a way that questions the distinction between the child who learns and the adult who produces (Furter 1977). School can therefore be seen as preparation for adult education (see forthcoming paper) and as such should concentrate less on facts (usually a combination of false and "merely useful" knowledge) and more on the skills required to learn (Cropley 1977). Lifelong learning thus becomes the embodiment of the contradictory goal of all education, the ability to teach oneself. It is supported both by those who wish everyone to have the power that education brings, and those in industry who wish people to have a more practical education (Furter 1977), perhaps one that reduces the cost to the employer of any further training, which is considered valuable in a job-competition model (Whitfield and Bourlakis 1991).

Given that education is consuming a growing slice of government expenditure in some countries, some would see lifetime learning as an appeal to "bootstraps", to let the individual who gains also pay for the learning. In Britain, the post-war settlement for education involved an increase in cost of around 350% in real terms, so that by 1967 expenditure on education was 5.3% of the GNP (Kelly 1992). One developing country was reported in the 1970s to be spending 18% of its GNP on educating 10% of its population. To educate them all would cost nearly twice the GNP (Cropley 1977). Yet however much is spent, the pressure for more continues and Britain is still compared unfavourably in this respect with other states (Yeomans 1996). There is, perhaps, a kind of Parkinson's Law of educational expenditure, where expenditure expands to meet the money available, such as in the TVEI scheme which has cost £1 billion by 1997, a fair proportion of which has gone on numerically-controlled lathes, pneumatics equipment and complex computer systems for schools which were never used (Yeomans 1996). Therefore others would see a learning society as a chance to limit or even reduce the amount spent on initial schooling, in order to put money into educating the majority of the population - adults - where it may be more cost-effective (Furter 1977), so breaking the monopoly of schools and rediscovering the importance of the home and community in personal development. Despite some claims to the contrary, pressure on education is not coming from demographics. Attention should be focusing away from the education of young people to the rest of the population which is ageing (Istance and Rees 1995), with more single person households perhaps containing working men or older women for whom education can provide a social community.

There are many good social and economic reasons for children to go to school and it used to be that so few continued their education into adulthood that the timing of this continuation was not important to most people (CERI 1975). But it is not clear why has educational expansion been so front-loaded and why, despite all the rhetoric, it continues to be so. Schools have sucked in almost all available resources and this may have been justified in part by greater equity of provision, and appeals to economic progress (CERI 1975). There is little evidence that the massification of school-based learning has really worked. Studies still describe serious inequalities in initial education in Britain, and some report declining standards of literacy, numeracy and behaviour. Students may stay in education well into adulthood for very negative reasons, while more enthusiastic adults may

be disenfranchised by their age or evidence of early immature "failure" (CERI 1975). As early as 1968 it was observed that "*there is at present, a tendency for pupils to stay on at school pursuing academic studies for which they may not be ideally suited. The country is short of engineers and technicians, yet engineering as a subject ranks sixteenth in order of choice among university students*" (South Wales Argus 30/5/68) and it is still true today that some students use FE courses as a temporary refuge from unemployment (Fevre 1997), even though they may be precisely the same kinds of 16/17 year olds that the local industry requires for the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme for example.

Lifelong learning can be seen as universal rather than elitist (Dave 1976), allowing genuine equality of later access even if an individual lacks interest in school during childhood. It must therefore differ from more traditional forms of adult education which have always had a kind of "second creaming" (Cropley 1977) such that only those who do well earlier return. In fact, lifelong learning (or recurrent or lifetime of intermittent learning) should be the reverse. A desire to leave school at the earliest opportunity has often been seen as a sign of failure and so resisted by concerned educationalists. However, this problem of motivation might be alleviated by allowing people to defer their educational rights until later (CERI 1975). Since the outcomes of schooling are known by later adulthood, recurrent education also allows the redressing of inequities. In this way early failure will not disenfranchise people for life and initial schooling might become a less significant determinant of life chances, although such a view ignores the possibility that through experience people might build up learning or non-learning "identities" that become as important determinants of future participation as the actual opportunities available to them. Other claims for lifetime learning are that it allows parents more immediate experience which is relevant to their children's education, always seen as an important factor in the performance of pupils (CERI 1975). It also deals more effectively with the problem of obsolete knowledge than a heavily front-loaded system. If the notion of a job for life with a planned career structure and associated company training scheme has gone (DfEe 1996_a), career transitions are becoming more frequent and the knowledge gained at induction or apprenticeship becomes obsolete quicker (Rees 1997). Rather than this situation calling for the provision of reactive retraining, as industries have changed according to one account (Downs 1993), they now require more people able to monitor events, diagnose problems

and respond appropriately. In these circumstances rote knowledge is of little use, and higher level cognitive skills such as problem-solving and hypothesis-testing are required.

One main reason given by advocates for the advancement of a learning society is a pseudo-progression. In this version, lifelong learning is essential since the rate of industrial, technological and societal change is exponential (Cropley 1977). The world is changing too quickly for one persons life to be considered to take place against a stable background (Employment Department Group 1994), and the rate of change is increasing over time, so that lifelong learning is becoming more and more essential to allow people to adapt (Coffield 1996_a). The position was summed up by one observer thus: "*In the past the time-span of important change was considerably longer than that of a single human life. Thus mankind was trained to adapt itself to fixed conditions. Today the time-span is considerably shorter than that of human life, and accordingly our training must prepare individuals to face a novelty of conditions*". However, as this was A.N. Whitehead speaking in the 1930s (p.15 in Dave 1976), two interpretations are possible. One is that the trend was discernible in 1930 and the situation must be much worse by now, but another is that like the need for lifelong learning, the apparent change over generations has always been seen as large and growing since by the very nature of memory and public records more is known of now and the recent past than more distant times. In the same way that it is possible in a model of an expanding universe based on the "big-bang" theory for observers in any galaxy to see every other galaxy moving away from them at a proportionately accelerating pace, so it is possible for observers in every age to decry the instability and transitory nature of the present.

Progression towards an ideal?

In several of the accounts indicated above, a learning society is seen as future ideal state, one towards which Britain is or should be striving, while any failures such as injustice and inefficiency in the current educational system may be part of the interim cost to be borne in the struggle. "*Sometimes glimpses of that vision seem to take shape, shimmering like a distant oasis*" (Cassels in Keep 1997). However, advocates of greater educational equality and industrial competitiveness are not new (Cropley 1977), while demands for lifelong or lifetime learning may be as old as recorded history itself (Dave 1976). In 1973, a South Wales

newspaper claimed that greater productivity in the depressed coalfield valleys would come not from longer working hours or greater effort but better organisation and more efficient machinery. "*Physical exertion is yielding to technical 'know how': we are truly in the age of the Technocrat*". The standard learning society analysis is too simple, suffering from what Yeomans (1996) calls "historical amnesia". "We" have been here before, as early as blaming the loss of industrial pre-eminence on a failure of the education system in the late nineteenth century (Rees 1997). In Britain, many of the policy components of a learning society were described and advocated by the Smith Report of 1919 (Lowe 1970, Furter 1977), although few were implemented, perhaps because lifelong education proposals often seem idealistic rather than practical to educational planners (Furter 1977). Lifelong learning was not perceived as having the economic benefits claimed by some more recent writers. For the 1917 Adult Education Committee and their 1919 report, education was the key to a better society. Although there was some emphasis on the economic benefits of learning, a special concern was that education was not simply for personal benefit alone but for the common good. Education should have a collective purpose. However, the report wisely accepted that educational progress does not come from educational reforms alone - in today's terms a learning society cannot be created just by providing more learning - and its recommendations included more leisure time for all, through longer holidays and shorter working hours, sufficient wages, better living conditions, including the formation of urban housing estates (such as the those appearing in the new town of Cwmbran in the 1960s), and holidays with pay (Lowe 1970). It was perhaps when society came closest to achieving these worthwhile goals, in the aftermath of the post-war settlement that South Wales came closest to becoming a learning society (Gorard et al. 1997b).

There are some indications that to a large extent elements of a true lifetime learning society may have been stronger in the past, for some sections of society and in some geographical areas, than they are today (see for example Rees 1997). Progress towards the ideal may therefore be retrograde. By this it is not simply meant that training today might be inferior to the craft-based systems of the past, or that the skills of brick-layers in the 1990s do not match those of the 1920s for example, or that a learning society has always existed for the most prosperous segment of the population if they wanted it (Coffield 1996a). Further differences are those between the collective and individual purposes of education and between

the oppositional and socialising purposes of learning. In the first part of this century, education for all was not underpinned so much as now by arguments of economic competitiveness or even increased social mobility (Lewis 1993). The main purpose of workers education was not to encourage talented individuals to leave their working community but to meet the rising aspirations of labour and to lead perhaps to greater political awareness or fuller participatory citizenship (see Gorard et al. 1997b). Education was part of politics, and workers education was as much a part of the rise of labour and the post-war settlement as compulsory initial education (Lewis 1993). Although there were tensions within the movement between radical and liberal intentions, and although individual class-mobility came to be accepted as an added bonus, as a whole the tentative alliance of university intellectuals and the inheritors of an older autodidact tradition was successful. Nowadays, the expansion of state education has institutionalised social mobility and while all mainstream political parties argue about an education-led economy or greater equality of opportunity, the more radical collective agenda of cultural and intellectual equality is ignored (Lewis 1993). Even the non-conformist inspired versions of education for cultural accomplishment have been lost (Rees 1996). The baby may have followed the bath water.

It is tentatively suggested here that, to the extent that it is correct to describe South Wales as having had a learning society in the past, this was underpinned by group loyalties to a variety of communities based in occupations and localities. If these loyalties have been undermined - as might be expected from those structural changes which have had far-reaching effects on occupations and localities - it might be expected that the heirs of those communities will no longer exhibit the orientations appropriate to a learning society (Fevre 1997). Their approach to education and training may be inspired by individualism, and this approach may be unable to produce the virtuous outcomes which are popularly supposed to arise in a learning society. It might be supposed that the individualist approach tends to produce an instrumentalist view of education and training which leads to outcomes which are a poor substitute for education and training inspired by group loyalties, or the more radical forms of education leading to political awareness. It also enhances what have been described as the "*insidious effects of learning as positional good*" (Keep 1997, p. 14).

A less agreeable interpretation

If it is argued that knowledge and skill becomes obsolete quickly and that competitive economies need to further automate their processes and production, then further training for all can quite reasonably be justified by policy-makers and backed up by the enhancement of workers status that the re-training or multi-skilling also provides. However, the same process can also be seen as justification for exploitation of the workforce, leading to greater productivity for the chief benefit of those at the top (Furter 1977). In a similar way, if it is argued that enhanced participation in education will lead to greater awareness of democratic procedures and citizenship, formal education can also be seen as socialisation of the population protecting those in power from any criticism which is free of cultural norms. A push towards institutionalising adult education prolongs the dependency of individuals on institutions, assisting the established order but possibly hindering the true outcome of education which is to enable all to take control of their own learning, to teach them to be independent of teachers (Furter 1977). All else may be trivia and false knowledge. Lifelong learning (and second chance schools), far from breaking the schools monopoly, can therefore be seen as an annexation of out-of-school territory by schoolers, using similar criteria to those that have already failed in schools, such as certifying individuals.

It may therefore be a delusion to think that creating more and more formal education can help with problems such as unemployment, social mobility and the conditions of working life. Formal education may help individuals without necessarily improving overall conditions for all. It can be argued that initial schooling is already too costly in terms of its economic benefit (Furter 1977) yet successive governments pledge more and more money to schools with little clear effect. Too much may be expected of education in terms of remedying the problems of society (Gorard 1997), making it the target of criticism that might be better addressed to the whole society (CERI 1975). Working life depends on having a job, its conditions, pay, career structure and division of labour among other things. All of these are generally outside workers' control, whereas voluntary training is not (although even here the institutional framework of the current VET system is not organised around and for the benefit of individuals, Keep 1997). Thus, it is odd that current solutions to the problems of working life are often reduced to the single idea of "qualifying" the individual to adapt and to agree to a "useful" training, where useful is defined as one suited chiefly to the

requirements and structures of the existing productive system (Furter 1977). This trick is a clever one since it is generally cheaper to train people to do the jobs that exist than it is to provide suitable jobs for people.

In fact, adult education has traditionally interested only a few in Britain where public spending on it in 1966 for example was much less than in other countries (Lowe 1970). Simply providing more chances through increased funding is probably not sufficient to overcome this, and the whole issue probably needs a rethink. Why, if there is huge unfulfilled demand for learning are taxpayers not clamouring for greater funding and why is any new funding voted for by adults almost inevitably spent on children? The latter could be altruism, but it is more likely that adults do not generally want more "schooling" and have to be motivated to learn by certification and promotion in order to improve their human capital. In fact, they may not do so even where these conditions exist. In this version of the learning society, learning is something that everyone does and wants to do, but informally. The "society" element could be an attempt at coercion, at control of one of its most powerful forces for change. In the past this control may have been though the extended family (Cropley 1977) passing on false knowledge such as religious observance and denying life opportunities to children in order to preserve them as an economic asset (Coleman 1990). This control passed to schools, which according to Cobbett taught children to be content to be slaves under the pretext of teaching them to read and write (Johnson 1993). Schools can be seen as preparing children for the world of work as defined by the employer - to do as they are told, turn up on time and move with the bell. Schooling may be marginal to real life for many people, but its compulsion has been formative in society, perhaps leading to loss of autonomy for families with deeper regulation by the state, with a clearer distinction between adults and children and between the place of work and home (Johnson 1993). On this analysis, it is not surprising that the lengthening of adolescence in society today has led to a demand by the state and employers for a lengthening of the "learning" (i.e. instructional) process. It may also be that a strong desire for learning in society appears more often in or immediately after periods of widespread excitement (Lewis 1993). Education may only be able to assist with major social change as long as people have the free time to pursue it. This may be why in Wales, if not in Austria (Jahoda et al. 1972), self-teaching, voluntary organisations (e.g. Hanson 1968) and political activity all increased during the

unemployment of the depression 1929-36 and why the trend continued post-1945 and the creation of the welfare state (Gorard et al. 1997b).

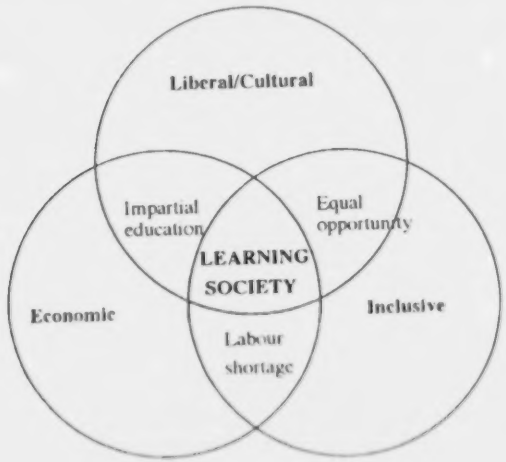
An even more extreme version would be that learning is something that everyone does instinctively and therefore not something that needs to be taught, especially by the appointees of the state (Frow and Frow 1990). It may be possible for all learning to be parsimoniously explained in terms of a process requiring no knowledge of results (i.e. no interaction and no feedback). In this account it is simply a change in behaviour produced by prior experience and taking place unconsciously all of the time. Therefore any attempt at formal education cannot affect the amount of learning taking place. It can only affect what is learnt and even here the results can be unpredictable. The assumption that teachers can transmit what is useful has been generally untested. The quality control of education is usually of the teaching not of the learning itself (Deamer 1996).

What is a learning society (revisited)?

At least three strands of a learning society have arisen in this brief discussion. The push for greater inclusiveness and the economic imperative, both currently in favour, and the older liberal view of a learning society as a cultured arena for civilised life. To a large extent these differing objectives require different approaches and benefit different sections of society. The economic argument tends to see people as human capital, only touching base with the inclusive argument when there is a shortage of appropriate labour, due to falling birth rates or a major war perhaps (see figure 1). Independent workers education can also be seen as economic in purpose, both the liberal-based supposedly "impartial" education represented by the WEA and university extra-mural classes, and the less formal anti-capitalist episodes. The inclusive argument for recurrent education is based on movement towards greater equality rather than towards greater quality. It has become mixed up with the more liberal view of equal opportunity rather than equality per se, and what remains has a tendency towards rather condescending compensatory forms of adult education. It is the liberal vision that explains the demand for learning for leisure and pleasure, for oneself and for one's peers, for "*taste, standards and criteria*" for making judgements (Hanson 1968), but this has also become one basis for the more recent appeal of marketisation, so that like the inclusive and economic ones, a liberal learning society is in danger of becoming one based solely on individual gain.

It would be elegant to conclude that a true learning society will exist when all three components are in harmony (the intersection in figure 1). However, it is not clear *a priori* that this is likely or even possible. The tensions may be just too great - between education as stimulus to action, changing one's own life as a step towards changing the world (Frow and Frow 1990), and education as a process of social control (Simon 1990b). The twin aims of education are fitting people for the social roles and promoting their ability to think independently. The challenge for educators is to overcome the inherent contradictions (Fryer 1990).

Figure 1 - Three components of a learning society



CONCLUSION

One purpose of this paper is to reinforce the suggestion made in Gorard et al. (1997b) that a learning society is not simply a desirable future objective, or an ideal towards which we progress in a smooth fashion. Nor, as evidenced by the

library loans during the depression for example, is it necessarily related to the economic position of the country. If it is a social and cultural phenomenon and not simply a normative concept of inclusiveness or product, then understanding the Learning Society may involve a better understanding of what has gone before. This is made more complex because the determinants of historical patterns of participation in education and training - family, industry, availability - are likely to be subject to geographically specific variations. In this way, the Learning Society can be seen as being based on real, rather than ideal, institutions and the social connections within and between them. Developments in education and training may be non-linear and retrograde in some respects for particular groups. Thus insights might be gained from an analysis of the way in which contemporary patterns of participation have emerged from previous ones, and these could also give a clue to the future.

While most people agree that society benefits from a well-trained workforce, there are currently tensions in relevant writing between an economic imperative and an inclusive definition of a learning society, which may upon analysis be found to be in conflict. Some want more money spent on initial or higher education, others wish to put the money into compensatory literacy schemes for example. Either way the pressure is to spend more and more money on education. Another tension lies in the false dichotomy of academic and vocational knowledge, which ignores the "*really useful knowledge ... calculated to make you free*" (Johnson 1993 p. 23). A more radical, some might say realistic, agenda as indicated by this paper requires more than educational change. It entails social and labour market reform as well (CERI 1975). Instead the radical agenda is undermined by concentration on HE and increased participation is advertised as widened participation (Edwards et al. 1993). Generally education is accepted as what it is, even though standards may be decried, and the growth of it is encouraged. Non-participants are therefore seen merely as a pool of potential clients for the existing set-up who must be enticed in without eroding quality (Harrison 1993). Non-participation is a problem and the fault lies with the client or the institutional marketing, or perhaps the barriers outlined above, not with the opportunities on offer. Meanwhile the phrase "Learning Society" is something of a Rorschach inkblot test, a miscellany of meaning confused by a common term. At least the debate continues.

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Appendix A - The "Home Internationals"

Progress towards four of the learning targets, by Wales, England and Scotland (figures from Jones 1996).

Foundation Target 1 - by 2000, 85% of young people to obtain 5 GCSE grades A-C, an intermediate level GNVQ, or NVQ level 2 by age 19.

	1991	1995
Wales	51.2	62.2
England	53.5	67.4
Scotland	65.4	69.8

There is in addition a new target for Wales that 50% of the cohort should get GCSE grade A-C in mathematics, a science and either English or Welsh (mistakenly referred to in policy documents as first languages, as though they were the only two possibilities).

Foundation Target 3 - by 2000, 60% of young people to obtain 2 A levels, an advanced GNVQ, or NVQ level 3 by age 21.

	1991	1995
Wales	24.0	43.9
England	29.6	44.0
Scotland	42.8	49.9

Educational participation of 16-18 year olds in Wales was 65% of the age group in 1993, on a par with only Greece and Portugal in the EU.

Lifetime Learning Target 1 - by 2000, 60% of workforce to obtain 2A levels, advanced GNVQ, or NVQ level 3.

	1991	1995
Wales	27.4	39.0
England	30.3	40.4
Scotland	37.5	47.3

Lifetime Learning Target 2 - by 2000, 30% of workforce to obtain NVQ level 4.

	1991	1995
Wales	14.6	23.4
England	17.2	23.8
Scotland	17.2	25.8

As far as it is possible to estimate, other countries in the EU have qualification levels way in excess of these targets (Jones 1996).

APPENDIX B - Some definitions used in the study

Common acronyms

HRD Human resource development - development of current workers
HRM Human resource management - includes VET and HRD and recruitment, compensation
VET Vocational education and training - acquiring skills formally relevant to work
(from Pettigrew et al 1989)

FE Further Education - Voluntary education at age 16+, similar to sixth-form in schools and FE colleges
HE Higher Education - University, Polytechnic and Institute based, leading to diploma/degree
GNVQ General National Vocational Qualification - started 1987
NVQ National Vocational Qualification - with standards set by employers, assessing competence for performing a job, flexible in delivery and form, open to all ages
TEC Training Enterprise Council - an employer-led company to assess local training needs and develop training strategies
TVEI Technical and Vocational Education Initiative
(from Employment Department Group 1994)

BTEC Business and Technician Education Council - centres have to be approved for qualifications leading to First 16+, and National 18+ Diploma
CGLI City and Guilds Of London Institute - geared to part-time study for those in work, curriculum compatible with industrial training objectives
CPVE Certificate of Pre-vocational Education - 16+ qualification of core skills, vocational studies, personal development, work experience
NCVQ National Council for Vocational Qualifications - oversees vocational qualifications, set up 1987 to co-ordinate and standardise
RSA Royal Society of Arts - offering spread of vocational and academic courses
WJEC Welsh Joint Examination Committee - examining board for GCSE and A level
(from WJEC 1994)

MAS Modern Apprenticeship Scheme - started in 1993, less than 30,000 applicants in 1995, over 60,000 in 1996 and the surge has surprised the TECs
(from TLS 1996, Unwin 1996)

YTS Youth Training Scheme - originally a one year course entered via employer or accredited agency such as local authority. Then a two-year course only in employment. More to do with generic skills and IT than narrow occupationally based skills
(from Bynner 1989)

Operational definitions

Training is defined as formal education after entering the workforce, and is "anything that may have helped with work". Vocational training is that undertaken to current or later work. Non-vocational training in anything else (Greenhalgh and Stewart 1987). No clear distinction is possible between initial and continuing training (DfEe 1995). The "transferability" of training is defined as the number of firms in which a person's marginal productivity is enhanced upon successful completion (from Dolton et al. 1994).

As described in Gorard et al. (1997_a), the analysis of the results of the survey will include division of the cases into types. A useful and simple dichotomy is that suggested by Park (1994) and others. "Learners" are those defined as having been involved in formal learners in the three years prior to the study (although the period in question is up to the discretion of the researcher). "Non-learners" are the remainder. A "learning event" (or project) must also have a minimum duration,

and four weeks is suggested by Schratz (1996), although this study also considers much shorter periods, such as half-day one-off courses.

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